

2016 Upper Potomac River Walleye Summary

The upper Potomac River supports a high quality walleye fishery, primarily in the middle section between Dam 3 (Harpers Ferry) and Dam 5 (Williamsport). Since initial stocking began in 1979, walleye numbers have increased and established a naturally reproducing population. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources (MD DNR) Freshwater Fisheries Program monitors the fishery through annual spring and fall boat electrofishing surveys.



MD DNR biologist with upper Potomac River adult walleye from spring and fall surveys

Results from the 2016 surveys show a large influx of smaller walleye (<15 inches) from the 2015 year-class (Figure 1). River conditions in 2015 allowed for strong recruitment of juvenile walleye into the population. Over the next several years this strong year-class should provide large numbers of adult fish for anglers. 2016 electrofishing catch rates for walleye >20 inches was 3.9 fish/hour, slightly below the past 10 year average of 4.2 fish/hour (Figure 2). Overall the surveys show a healthy productive fishery with a good distribution of juvenile and adult sized walleye.

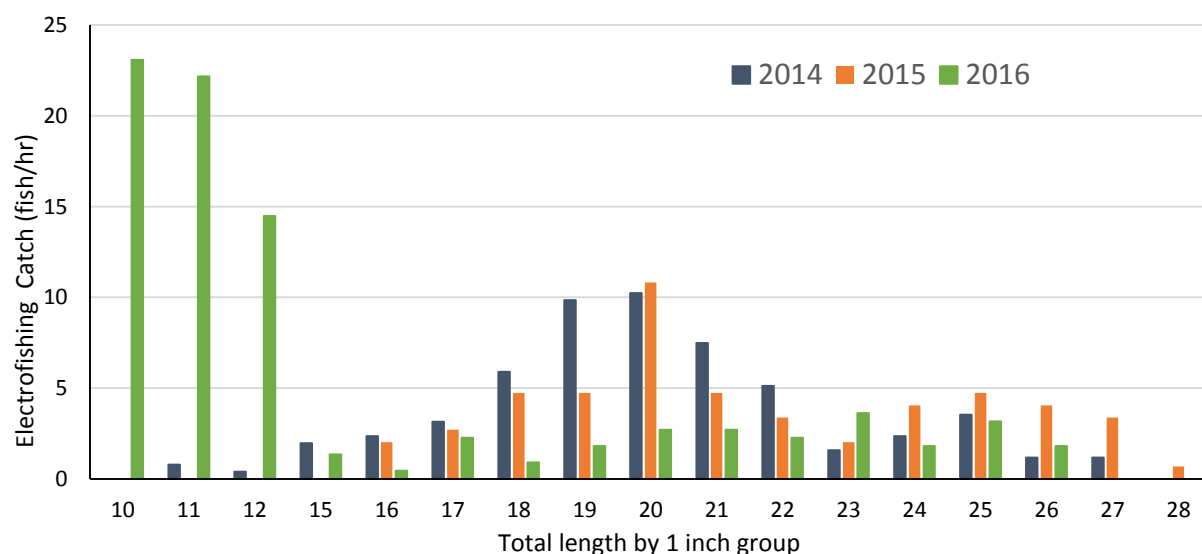


Figure 1. Size distribution of upper Potomac River walleye collected by boat electrofishing in spring 2014-2016.

In efforts to maintain a high quality walleye fishery in the upper Potomac River, MD DNR Freshwater Fisheries Program resumed spring stocking of fingerling walleye in 2013. Each year broodstock are collected below river dams and transported to a state hatchery for spawning. The resulting 1" fingerlings are chemically marked and stocked into the middle section of the river. A three year analysis of young-of-year fish found that roughly 50% of juvenile walleye collected in the fall were hatchery stocked. The supplemental fingerling stockings significantly contribute to year-class strength. Broodstock collection and fingerling stocking will continue in 2017.



(L to R) Walleye fingerlings; adult walleye broodstock

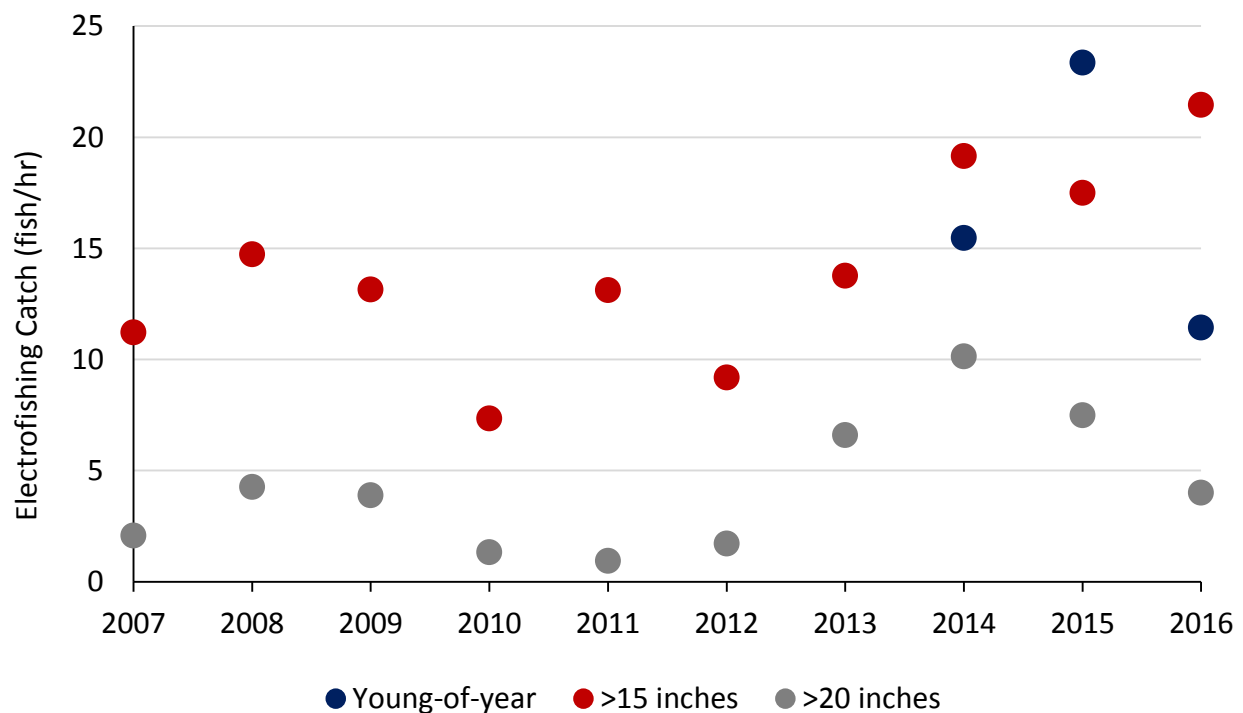


Figure 2. Upper Potomac River (Dam 4 to Dam 3) walleye fall boat electrofishing catch rates (2007-2016).

For 2017, anglers can expect good numbers of walleye in the 15 – 20 inch range thanks to the strong 2015 year-class. Anglers are reminded of the current Maryland regulations for walleye.

- Year round minimum size = 15 inches
- January 1 – April 15 maximum size = 20 inches (mainstem Potomac River from Chain Bridge in DC to Cumberland, MD)
- Daily creel limit = 5 legal size fish

For more information or question regarding the upper Potomac River fisheries, please contact Michael Kashiwagi (Michael.kashiwagi@maryland.gov).